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BOUNDARIES OF NATIONAL BELONGING IN INGRIAN FINNISH RETURN MIGRATION: *A Multi-level Perspective*

Abstract

This study examines the discursive construction of Finnishness within the context of Ingrian Finns' return migration from Russia to Finland. The focus is on how characteristics of Finnishness, especially ancestry and language, are employed at institutional, community and interpersonal levels of text and talk. The results show how the same characteristics can be used to both in- and exclude Ingrian Finns from the national ingroup, and how essentialist notions of ethnonational belonging can be used strategically by both state authorities and Ingrian Finns themselves to make claims about their Finnishness and right to remigrate.

Keywords

Identity • discourse analysis • return migration • Finland • Ingrian Finns

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1 Introduction

The social construction of ethnic and national identities is based on social processes of in- and exclusion. As pointed out by Karner (2007: 48), the boundary constructed between 'us' and 'them' is profoundly political insofar as the construction and reproduction of ethnic identities needs to be understood in its wider contexts of unequally distributed power; and it is symbolic insofar as it makes use of repertoires of culturally shared meaning'. This study focuses on the discursive construction of Finnishness and the negotiation of its boundaries with reference to Ingrian Finnish return migration from Russia to Finland. Most of these return migrants are the descendants of seventeenth to early twentieth century Finnish immigrants to the Ingria region¹. In 1617, Sweden annexed Ingria from Russia and sought to replace the area's Orthodox population with Lutherans. Thus, Finns were encouraged to move to Ingria. After this first wave of emigration, smaller groups of Finns also emigrated to the Soviet Union. Although not all those of Finnish origin living in Russia are Ingrian Finns, in Finland the term Ingrian Finn is generally used to refer to all former Soviet citizens of Finnish descent. In Russia and the former Soviet Union, however, Ingrian Finns have typically just been called Finns (Davydova 2003, Tiaynen 2012). This, together with the fact that the content and meaning of ethnic identity vary within and between generations of Ingrian Finns (Kyntäjä 2001), has made the category label of 'Ingrian Finn' far from straightforward.

For decades, it was difficult for Ingrian Finns in the Soviet Union to maintain and express their culture, but *glasnost* and the collapse of the USSR allowed them to rediscover their ethnic roots. Around

the same time, repatriation to Finland became possible. In 1990, Finland's president Mauno Koivisto announced that Soviet nationals of Finnish descent had the right to apply for Finnish repatriate status to migrate to Finland. However, by the late 1990s and early 2000s, some Finnish politicians began reassessing the relative 'Finnishness' of Ingrian Finns, many of whom did not speak Finnish and were perceived to have difficulties in integrating into Finnish society. Heikkinen (2003) called this 'the ethnic paradox of return migration'—while the president invited Finns, authorities were surprised to receive 'Russians' (i.e. people not considered to be Finnish enough). During the 20 years of remigration, approximately half of the Ingrian Finnish population (some 30 000 people) moved to Finland, before the return migration queue was closed in 2011.

The importance of ethnic roots for the individual does not necessarily fade over generations. In fact, the meaning afforded to ethnic roots is often accentuated in the process of return migration (e.g., Tsuda 2003: 367). Although return migrants often consider themselves as members of the national majority group, they often face rejection and questioning of their identity (e.g., Tsuda 2003). Consequently, the question of who can be considered a member of an ethnic or national ingroup is essentially a question of power, and the answer is dependent on both whom you ask and the situation at hand. These complexities highlight the importance of studying return migrants' identities as discursively constructed by different actors in various situations. Compared to other migrant groups, return migrants may be considered close to—if not part of—the ethnic majority.

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Examining how Ingrian Finns and Finnishness are defined in the context of ethnic return migration can show some of the paradoxes and contradictions involved in defining borders of nations and ethnic communities. With a comparative analysis of data from institutional, community and interpersonal levels, it is possible to achieve a more multifaceted picture of how boundaries of national belongingness are discursively produced.

2 A Multilevel Perspective to Discursive Identity Construction

To date, most research related to discursive identity construction has focused on the viewpoint of national majorities, examining how they construct national identities (Billig 1995; Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl & Liebhart 2009) and categories for different minority groups (Verkuyten 2005a). There is also a limited field of research on the discursive construction of ethnic minority and immigrant identities (e.g., Merino & Tileaga 2011; Verkuyten & De Wolf 2002), also in the Finnish context (e.g. Olakivi 2013). Further, the number of previous discursive studies on ethnic return migration is very small. Oda (2010) studied Japanese Brazilian return migration to Japan (see also Tsuda 2003) and noticed that there was not only a tension between official and informal views of this group's cultural identification (i.e. officially Japanese but unofficially Brazilian), but also a related tension on the justification for their right to return migration.

In the present immigration context, Davydova (2003) and Davydova and Heikkinen (2004) have studied the discursive construction of (Ingrian) Finnishness, and problematised how Finnishness is defined through language and cultural skills. Their analysis has highlighted how in these circumstances only biological ancestry can be used as an 'objective' marker of ethnic belonging. Also relevant for the present research is a previous study utilising the same focus group data. Varjonen, Arnold and Jasinskaja-Lahti (2013) studied Ingrian Finnish return migrants' identity talk before and after their migration from Russia to Finland. The analysis showed that these migrants' discursive construction of identities typically employed the concepts of biological roots and socialisation (cf. Davydova 2003; Davydova & Heikkinen 2004), as well as a notion of being excluded by the majority in both countries (cf. Tiainen 2012). However, these studies have not tackled specifically the discursive strategies employed in negotiations over national belonging taking place at several different levels by different actors, such as politicians, community leaders and return migrants themselves. In this study, we analyse the discursive construction of Finnishness at institutional, community and interpersonal levels as is described next in more detail.

Ethnic and national identities are seen as constantly transforming, renewed, reinterpreted and renegotiated according to changing circumstances and interests (Petersoo 2007). Thus, research on discursive identity construction has stressed the importance of taking into account the cultural, historical, and social context in which identity construction takes place (e.g., Benwell & Stokoe 2006: 17-47). Ethnic and national identities are shaped not only by external elites and individuals, but also by ethnic communities with their own internal power structures (Clary-Lemon 2014: 25; Karner 2007: 62). Thus, we utilize a multilevel approach incorporating institutional, community, and interpersonal level data when analysing how Finnishness is constructed in the context of Ingrian Finns' return migration. This kind of approach is largely missing from previous research, as researchers tend to focus on one data level only. One exception can be found in a study by Wodak and colleagues (2009):

their critical discourse analysis of the construction of Austrian national identity employs political commemorative speeches (i.e., public sphere), focus groups (i.e., semipublic sphere), as well as individual interviews (i.e., semiprivate sphere).

The analytical approach of the present study reflects the formulation of Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 29), according to whom a discursive view on identity can be realised 'as a discursive performance or construction of identity in interaction, or as a historical set of structures with regulatory power upon identity'. Inspired by Wetherell's (1998) synthetic approach, we hold that these approaches can be combined, and therefore look at both what is happening at the local interactional level and on a broader sociopolitical level. We consider how power relations make certain constructions of identity ideologically dominant (Hjelm 2011: 140-1; Wodak et al. 2009), and how such constructions are contextually informed and responsive to the environment in which they are produced and received (Wodak et al. 2009: 8). We view discourses as pervasively rhetorical, interactional, situational, and functional (Potter & Wetherell 1987; Verkuyten & De Wolf 2002). In our analysis we therefore pay close attention to categories, identity markers, 'identity rules' (McCrone 2002) and other discursive and rhetorical resources employed in the construction of Ingrian Finnishness and Finnishness more generally.

3 Data sets used for analysis

While the institutional level data cover the whole 20-year period from the beginning of Ingrian Finnish return migration to its end (i.e., 1990-2010), the community and interpersonal level data come from the three last years of remigration (2008-2010). We chose not to limit the time period analysed at the institutional level as identity negotiations at the community and interpersonal levels cannot be properly understood without the whole background of the Ingrian Finnish return migration. The community level data set, in turn, was planned to match the time period covered in the interpersonal level data collected before the present study.

The institutional level data related to Ingrian return policy includes 49 statements and initiatives from Finnish politicians on Ingrian Finns' return policy. The community level data, in turn, comes from the editorials of *News from Ingria* (Uutisia Inkeristä), the monthly Finnish-language journal of Inkerin Liitto, the association of Ingrian Finns². This data corpus consists of 32 editorials, mainly written by the chairman of the association. The interpersonal level data comes from the longitudinal INPRES³ project focusing on the migration and integration processes of Ingrian Finnish return migrants from Russia to Finland. The focus group data analysed here was collected before and after migration. Four premigration focus groups were conducted in 2008 in Petrozavodsk and St Petersburg. Participants were Ingrian Finns who were recruited through Finnish language courses organised for potential return migrants. There were 26 participants in total (four males, 22 females), with six to seven participants in each group. The participants were in their 30s to 60s. In 2010, after the participants had lived in Finland between 1 and 2 years, three follow-up focus group discussions were conducted with 11 participants (two males and nine females), with three to five participants in each group. All 11 participants had also participated in first-round focus groups in 2008. These follow-up focus groups were carried out at the University of Helsinki, Unit of Social Psychology.

The examples of the data given are chosen to exemplify ways of speech typical for each of the data sets. The analysis of all data⁴ has been done in Finnish, based on the original Finnish language data

sets at the institutional and community levels, and on the Russian language focus group data that was professionally translated to Finnish.

4 Analysis of the Identity Markers of Finnishness

In a television interview on 10 April 1990, President Mauno Koivisto's first publically discussed a return program for Ingrians, affecting ca. 87 000–100 000 people of Finnish descent living in Russia (Häikiö & Aunesluoma 1990). In the interview, President Koivisto stated that because of their Finnish ancestry and Lutheran religion, Ingrian Finns should be considered as having the right to remigrate to Finland. Already before, it was possible for descendants of Finnish citizens to (re)migrate to Finland. At this point, for historical, political, and economic reasons, this right was also extended to Ingrian Finns.

The first Act specifically addressing the issue of return migration in 1991 stated that at least one of the grandparents of the applicant should be of Finnish background, but in a 1996 amendment (parliamentary act 511/1996) the requisites for ancestry were tightened to two grandparents. In the 1996 amendment, it was also stated that connection to Finland and Finnishness should be proven by fluency in Finnish or Swedish, as well as knowledge of Finnish society and culture. Later, in a 2003 amendment to the law (parliamentary act 218/2003), participation in returnee orientation program organised by Finnish authorities in Russia was also required. The final decision to close the application queue came in 2010. According to the estimation of Finnish government⁵, at that point ca. 30 000 people of Finnish descent had moved to Finland mainly from Russia and Estonia, and a few thousand migrants are still expected to move to Finland before the final deadline in 2016⁶.

Remigration legislation thus became increasingly exclusive, but ancestry and language remained as identity markers—the key characteristics of Finnish group belongingness, used as grounds for the right to remigrate. As pointed out by Karner (2007: 101), ethnic or cultural characteristics such as language or ancestry are often used by state institutions as criteria for inclusion in the national community, and this has also been shown in the Finnish context (Laari 1998). In the following analysis, we will examine more specifically the use of these markers in the discursive construction of Finnishness.

5 Institutional Level: Using Integration Capability to Draw Boundaries of National Belonging

In the early 1990s many Finnish MPs advocated the inclusion of Ingrian Finns within the Finnish national community, supporting President Koivisto's view. Ingrian return migration was particularly welcomed, for instance, by MPs from the populist Finnish Rural Party. In a May 1990 written statement to Parliament member Tina Mäkelä stated that Ingrian Finns 'bring much needed help particularly to Southern Finland's current labour shortage, and on the other hand the measure reaches out to those people that consider themselves Finnish, living in the Soviet Union' (parliamentary protocol KK 329/1990). However, from the beginning, other more critical claims were made against Ingrian Finns' Finnishness and integration abilities. An example can be found in a September 1990 statement to Parliament from a group of National Coalition MPs⁷:

Ingrian Finns who move to Finland come to a country that is strange and alien to them, and they must start their lives from scratch here. While the first stages of their migration here have revealed some degree of competence in the Finnish language, and a better education than the average, their knowledge of Finnish society is very incomplete. (Parliamentary protocol RA 2063/1990)

While the earlier statement from MP Mäkelä presents an Ingrian-inclusive construction of Finnishness and implies that a common national identity facilitates and simplifies Ingrian labour market integration, the latter quotation challenges the Finnishness of Ingrian Finns with the choice of words that maximises the cultural distance between Ingrian Finns and Finns living in Finland (i.e., Finland as 'alien' to Ingrian Finns, their knowledge of Finnish society as 'very incomplete' and the notion of their lives starting 'from scratch'). In the following years, the particular issue of limited Finnish language competency became a key theme in the statements provided by Finnish MPs. To a certain extent, these concerns were addressed by the 1996 reforms to the return immigration policy, which introduced language-proficiency criteria. However, even after 1996, some Finnish MPs questioned the Finnishness of arriving Ingrian Finns. In 1998 a quartet of National Coalition parliamentarians (Kimmo Sasi, Ilkka Kanerva, Ben Zyzkowitz and Suvi Lindén), stated:

Today, however, only about a fifth of Ingrian returnees coming to Finland can speak Finnish, and for many the connection to Finland is actually very weak. Their ability to gain employment in Finland is also very poor. This situation has led to Finland likely gaining an unemployed and Russian minority with no language skills that is threatened with deep social exclusion. (Parliamentary protocol KVN 43/1998)

Here, the Finnishness of Ingrian Finns appears to hinge on whether or not they speak Finnish: even unsubstantiated statistics are used to make a case about their poor language skills (for the use of statistics as a way of convincing, see Potter 1996). This, in turn, is seen to have direct consequences on their integration potential (cf. Olakivi 2013 on the role of Finnish skills in the integration of immigrant care workers). Increasing the credibility of their argument, the speakers present their evaluation of Ingrian Finns' ties to Finland as a fact ('for many the connection to Finland is actually very weak'). Further, their criticism is communicated through concern about the well-being of these migrants themselves, which can be seen as a discursive device of 'stake inoculation' (Potter, 1996), which functions to protect the speakers from counterarguments by deflecting questions of motive.

Another way of criticising Ingrian Finns' return migration was related to the vitality of the Ingrian-Finnish community in Russia. This criticism of the return migration policy is given by the Centre Party parliamentarian Hannu Kemppainen, in October 1996:

Though the return migration certainly meant good for the Ingrian population, it has begun negative trends in the migrants' regions of origin, especially Ingria. The recovery of their own language and culture began with perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union, but now this kind of return migration activity has seen an alarming decline in the most active part of the Ingrian population, including cultural and administrative figures, many of whom have moved or are expected to move to Finland. At worst, such developments will lead to an ethnic cleansing of the area.

Kemppainen does not directly present Ingrian Finns as non-Finnish. However, he addresses the topic of return migration by describing its potential consequences from the point of view of the local Ingrian community and Ingria as a cultural and geographical area. After bringing forth the positive side of return migration (discursive tool of concession, Potter 1996), he portrays Ingrians, using the term 'Ingrians' over 'Ingrian Finns', as a separate group rather than presenting them as more or less Finnish. Using extreme vocabulary (ethnic cleansing), the arguments are built to express concern for the Ingrians themselves, not for Finland as a receiving society. Again, this is an example of stake inoculation.

In some cases the connection between Ingrian Finns and Finland was explicitly denied. MP Sulo Aittoniemi (Alkionien Centre Group) submitted to parliament in 2002 that 'the large part of the Ingrian Finns coming to Finland do not have any roots in the direction of Finnishness' (parliamentary protocol TAA 415/2002). Although Aittoniemi goes further than Kemppainen in undermining the connection between Ingrians and the Finnish state, in both examples Ingrian Finns are being defined by their historical presence in Ingria. These constructions imply that Finland is not, or no longer, their homeland.

Therefore, though there is a considerable variety to the discursive practices employed by Finnish MPs on Ingrian Finns and their connection to Finland at this time, there appears to be an emergent consensus at the turn of the millennium that Ingrian Finns should be treated as a separate group to Finns. In this context, the ultimate cancelation of the Ingrian Finns' return policy in 2010 hardly seems surprising. The decision, as described by the Finnish government in its proposal for closing the return migrant queue was explained thus:

The purpose of the return migration has been to permit the migration of people who have embraced Finnish identity and a sense of belonging to Finland. The generation of return migrants has, however, partly changed over the years, and part of the people trying to come to Finland via the return migration system do not necessarily feel themselves as Finnish in the same way the previous generation did. Some people may want to move to Finland as returnees partly because the system in question is in some respects more permissive than the general permit system rather than on the grounds that they would seek to establish ties with the country from which their parents or grandparents originate from. The maintenance of a special residence permit procedure for Ingrian Finns is no longer appropriate, and the residence permit system should be harmonized and clarified. (Parliamentary act 220/2010)

It is significant that the Finnish government's decision is predicated on notions of identity and on how Finnish Ingrian Finns themselves apparently feel, rather than how well they fit the criteria for remigration outlined in the law. Even though there is no mention of Finnish identity in the remigration legislation, it is suddenly used here as a criteria that requires no further explanation. There is also no rationale given for why younger generations of Ingrian Finns may not consider themselves Finnish. This excerpt is in line with the aforementioned constructions of Ingrian Finns as foreigners in Finland, based in part on their linguistic otherness. Although the criteria now used are radically different, the resulting effect is similar as in the previous quotations: Ingrian Finns are constructed as not belonging to Finland.

As such, the analysis of discursive constructions of Finnish and Ingrian identity among Finnish policymakers over the 1990s and

2000s reflect rather essentialist definition of Finnishness (i.e. Finns as collectively Finnish speaking). In social psychology, ethnic group essentialism refers to the presentation of ethnic groups as obvious, natural categories with relatively fixed characteristics (Verkuyten 2005b). Essentialist discourses can be used dynamically to reach rhetorical and ideological goals (Hanson-Easey, Augoustinos & Moloney 2014), and also in the present data, characteristics of Finnishness have been employed both to in- and exclude, to legitimise and delegitimise Ingrian Finns' Finnishness (which further legitimised and delegitimised their right to remigrate). Overall, the discursive construction of Finnishness in this period appears quite consistent, whereas the position of Ingrian Finns in relation to Finnishness undergoes a significant transformation.

6 Community Level: Preserving Ingrian Finnishness in the Face of Adversity

Much like at the institutional level talk on Finnishness, the role of Finnish language is highly present also in the *News from Ingria* editorials. The editorial 2/2008 serves as a good example:

Which are the characteristics that have made Ingrian Finns a nation? I think there are three of them: 1. Finnish language, that distinguished them from the national majority of Russia, 2. Lutheranism, that distinguished them from other Finnish speakers in Ingria and 3. belongingness to Ingria, which helped the rapid progression of the nation in the turn of 19th and 20th century and defined the nation's tragic destiny in the last century.

Thus, Finnish language has great significance. Every language has its own worldview, own rhythm of life and thought, own sense of humour and melody. Language opens a gate to the world of old myths and the literature of the new era. In that sense, language better than anything else depicts and maintains the psychological characteristics of a nation, which are the most important features of national identity.

But which language? Every Finn knows two languages—"mother tongue" (local dialect) and "Finnish" (standard language). The right answer is, without a doubt—standard Finnish. Namely it connects, remember what we speak in summer festivals when Ingrian Finns from different countries come together. Dialect is a form of spoken language, which changes very fast. —While standard Finnish is a bridge also to Finnishness of Finland, the influence of which to our small nation losing its identity is becoming more and more decisive. (2/2008)

From this rich excerpt, several points should be brought forward. Right at the beginning, the editor describes languages as the core of all nations—Ingrian Finns among them. In the same excerpt, categories of 'Finns', 'Ingrian Finns' and 'Finnishness of Finland' can all be found. While Lutheranism is used to make strategic distinctions to socially relevant outgroups such as the Orthodox Church (for similar notions, see Figgou 2012; Yildiz & Verkuyten, 2013), the Finnish language is seen to bind all Finns together. However, Ingrian Finns are not seen as Finns, but as a distinct nation among others. This resembles the way Ingrians were described as a distinct population in the talk of MP Hannu Kemppainen (see above).

The role of language is presented in an essentialist or even biological way (cf., Figgou 2012; Verkuyten & De Wolf 2002), as it

is linked to 'the psychological characteristics of a nation', and not only some but 'every Finn' is expected to speak at least two forms of Finnish language (standard language and a dialect). However, the editor is very definitive about the central role of standard Finnish, which binds together Ingrian Finns and Finns in Finland. This, in turn, is presented as almost a question of life and death for the survival of the community. Interestingly, both the particularity of Ingrian Finns and their connectedness to Finnishness in Finland serve here the same function of cultural maintenance and continuity.

As regards potential threats to the vitality of Ingrian Finnish culture, editorial 11/2010, entitled 'The Tragedy of Ingrian Finns', discusses Ingrian Finns' hardships related to the survival of the Finnish language in Ingria. The editor asks with a slightly accusatory tone, 'Can there be anything more horrendous than when children and parents do not understand each other, when the creations of the older generation are destroyed and not transmitted to the next generation, when a nation learns nothing from its own history?' With this linking of present cultural dilution and the Ingrian Finns' past sufferings, the reader's emotions are appealed to, and the group (or nation) is presented as under a serious threat. Importantly, while biological ancestry is a key marker of Finnishness in the remigration legislation, it is not referred to in the editorials covered in the present analysis. Instead, generational continuity is depicted through culture and language, as in the excerpt above.

Indeed, knowing the Finnish language and performing Finnish culture are presented as identity markers and prerequisites for being a real Finn, much like in the political statements discussed above (cf. Davydova 2003). For example, in editorial 8/2010 on traditional and current lifestyles of Ingrian Finns and the role of Ingrian Finns as a bridge between Finland and Russia, the editor asks, 'What if one does not have those assets—language skills [in Finnish] and cultural expertise [in Finnish culture]? Well, then it is worth thinking whether the person in question is Finnish and how s/he eventually differs from the majority [Russians].' This discourse of 'doing ethnicity', that is, behaving in a manner seen as typical for ethnic ingroup members (Verkuyten & De Wolf 2002) is used quite exclusively and authoritatively: the excerpt exemplifies the role of the Ingrian Finnish association in setting and defending boundaries of Finnishness to the members of the community. The role of language and cultural skills is stressed also in editorials debating the closing of the return migration queue. A typical example of the rhetoric used can be found from editorial 1/2010, in which the editor questions the decision made by the Finnish government by presenting Ingrian Finns as having exceptionally positive qualities compared to other migrant groups arriving in Finland (see also 2/2010):

But who are better suited to Finland's labour market than Ingrian Finns? They are oriented towards Finland, they have some cultural and language abilities needed for living in the Finnish society, they have good education and they are willing to work in trades to which you cannot find willing Finns anymore. I am totally sure that practical nurses from the Philippines and temporary farm workers from the EU and Bulgaria are worse options to the labour market of Finland. Thus, there is no discordance with the directive programme! (1/2010)

The supremacy of Ingrian Finns here is not based on blood or ancestry—another possible rhetorical resource—but portraying Ingrian Finns as having the cultural skills, education and attitude demanded in the Finnish labour market. As a whole, cultural skills are presented quite strategically in the editorials: although a concern

is frequently expressed about the negative consequences of return migration for generational continuity and the vitality of the Ingrian Finnish community in Russia (2/2008, 4/2010, 8/2010, 10/2010, 11/2010), the return migration right of Ingrian Finns is forcefully defended against the Finnish authorities (1–4 2010).

In sum, when looking at the community-level identity work, Ingrian Finnish identity is presented as dynamic but traditional, with the core or *essentia* (Figgou 2012; Verkuyten 2005b)—Finnish language and cultural heritage—remaining the same. The editorials portray a group persistently fighting against the fragmentation and dilution of its culture following return migration and the consequently widening generational gap between younger and older members of the community.

7 Interpersonal Level: Negotiations over Being a Finn

Similar to the institutional and community levels, Finnish language was a frequent topic at the interpersonal level. In the following extract, Finnish language is employed as a marker or an important element of Finnishness. (See Appendix for transcription conventions.)

Moderator: So what does it mean to you to be Finnish or then Ingrian Finnish?

Unidentified speaker: Ingrian Finnish, I think so—it is the language, which in the childhood, true enough, it is already in adulthood dissipated a little bit, the language, um, of one's father, mother, grandmothers (3) in first place is the language (2) what else can it mean to be Finnish, in general, in addition to that? (Focus group 1-1)

Here (Ingrian) Finnishness is equalled with (and limited to) Finnish language, which one gets in touch with and possibly acquires in childhood. Reference to older generations binds together two central markers of Finnish identity: language and ancestry. There were also other instances in the data where the participants talked about having grown up in a partly Finnish language environment and having acquired some Finnish skills in childhood, but later forgetting the language. Some participants also pointed out that there were times when people were afraid to talk Finnish in public, referring to the rule under Stalin. Overall, Finnish language was treated as an important dimension of Finnishness, and yet it also appeared as a problematic resource for constructing a Finnish identity on a personal level in the sense that the participants were predominantly Russian speakers. While poor Finnish skills did not prevent the participants from claiming a Finnish identity in the premigration focus group discussions, in postmigration focus groups maintaining a Finnish identity seemed more difficult. In those discussions, the participants sometimes treated less than perfect Finnish skills as indicating of Russian identity and providing no possibility for Finnish self-label.

The topic of Finnish language was not only discussed as a marker of identity, but also as an important tool needed for adaptation and integration in Finland. The following extract is an example of this:

Jekaterina⁸: I sat my child down, we moved. 'Do you want to live?' He says: 'I want to'. 'There is no other alternative, one must learn the language.' Or then one starts to feel more confident. Without the language, there is no work, no life. If you want to live, you must learn the language, that is necessary. And then the child

said: 'I understood'. So that's okay. But now I don't understand him. ((everyone laughing)) (Focus group 7-2)

The strong normative tone and several extreme case formulations (Pomerantz 1986; Potter 1996) used in this extract can be seen as echoing the institutional level discourse which also emphasizes the importance of adequate language skills. Here, however, knowing the Finnish language is constructed as a practical skill one can and must learn in order to successfully adapt to a new homeland, rather than an entry criteria or an essential marker of Finnishness. Learning Finnish is thus presented as a vital precondition for living in, but not moving to, Finland.

Finnish ancestry, another key element of Finnishness found especially at the institutional level, was also widely discussed in the focus group data. One of the questions asked by the moderator in the premigration focus groups particularly concerned the participants' views on the potential role of Finnish roots in adaptation to Finland. The next excerpt is part of the discussion that followed this question. After a lengthy discussion on how non-Finnish people have adapted to Finland, participants focused on the adaptation of Ingrian Finns:

Lilya: But for Finns, especially for those who are ethnically Finnish, for them it is in any case a bit easier, because they better (.) in any case there is something in common between Ingrian Finns and Finns. There is something or ours. I have a grandfather, he lived in the territory of Finland. So that is something, some sort of a blood relationship exists anyhow.

Natasha: It brings you closer together, brings closer together.

Lilya: Therefore, a bit easier. My husband is purely Russian. He will have it more difficult, I think. A little bit, like, to understand those people, it is easier for me, because there is something in common.

Unidentified speaker: Roots, they are not a minor thing. This is like from generation to generation. Everything is at the genetic level. Like we already like, um, have protection for adaptation, yes. Of course, we are not going to any Africa ((laughter)). Because roots, they mean very much. Because we feel ourselves.

Natasha: It warms you, warms you, that you after all are just like connected to Finns, that you have some kind of a relationship and it warms you and brings you closer, even warmth due to that.

Unidentified speaker: Of course, when I know, that my father and mother, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts and uncles, I have all Finnish, like. So of course. (...) So everyone is in any case different and we in any case belong to the Finnish nation, because roots, it's, it's, it's an important thing. I think like that. I'm telling you, at least, I'm telling you, I felt, this is the place where I have to be, that I liked everything. (Focus group 1-1)

By using words such as 'blood relationship', 'genes' and 'roots' throughout this extract, Finnishness is portrayed as biologically inherited. These biological explanations ('biological repertoire' in Varjonen et al. 2013) resemble a way of talking about identities which Verkuyten and De Wolf (2002) call 'being'. Toward the end of the extract, there are also elements of a 'feeling' discourse: constructions of ethnic identity as based on private, 'inner' feelings

(Verkuyten & De Wolf 2002). Unlike in the study by Verkuyten and De Wolf (ibid), however, here the link between inner feelings and an ethnic identity are not explained by early socialization but rather on biologically inherited Finnishness. Such a construction of Finnishness can be seen as drawing from essentialist discourse, that is, portraying Finns as an obvious, solid and natural ethnic group, similarly to many institutional level constructions presented above. In this jointly produced account, Finnishness is described as an asset which facilitates the adaptation to Finland and puts Ingrian Finns in a more advantageous position compared to those migrants with no Finnish roots. Using Africa as a contrast to Finland as an example of an absurd alternative destination, return migration to Finland as the country of one's ethnic origin is constructed as natural and logical. References to warm feelings, togetherness and personally felt belonging further solidify this construction and create a harmonious relationship between Ingrian Finns and Finland. As a result, Finland is portrayed as a place where the discussants as persons of Finnish origin are entitled and supposed to be. Overall, at the interpersonal level Finnish ancestry was the key element in constructions of Finnishness. Finnish language was also often used as a marker of Finnishness, although less frequently than Finnish ancestry. This is perhaps understandable considering that the participants were only (re)learning the language often forgotten in childhood and therefore not yet fluent in Finnish. Finnish ancestry as a provider for 'inner Finnishness' is something that is difficult to challenge by others, unlike fluency in Finnish language.

8 Discussion

Our analysis has shown that even though ancestry and language were used in officials' discourse as markers of inclusion in the group of Finns, these markers could also be used to exclude. As pointed out by McCrone (2002), under certain conditions and in particular contexts, identity markers can be interpreted strategically differently. Indeed, also the boundaries of belonging can be set so tightly around the 'core markers of Finnishness' that they include only those Ingrian Finns who equal Finnish nationals in their linguistic and cultural skills. This is particularly evident at the institutional level, where the identity work was related to governing: dealing with immigration politics and the boundaries of the national majority. Nevertheless, requiring Ingrians to be identical to majority Finns can be considered as unrealistic and also unreasonable (Heikkinen, 2003). Furthermore, in the current era of increasing cultural diversity, the whole idea of an ethnically characterized 'majority Finn' can well be questioned.

In our analysis, the Ingrian Finnish community was also shown to strategically define their own boundaries in order to build both cultural connections and cultural distinctiveness. While Finnish language was presented as a link to the Finnish culture in Finland, the maintenance of distinctive Ingrian Finnish culture or even nation was also strongly emphasized (cf. Verkuyten 2005b: 123-148, for strategic use of essentialist discourse among ethnic minority groups). This idea of Ingrian Finnish nation is almost nonexistent in the talk of Ingrian Finnish return migrants. In the focus group discussions, the categories of 'Ingrian' or 'Ingrian Finnish' were rarely employed and self-identities were mostly defined in relation to two main groups: Finns and Russians. This was the case especially in the focus group discussions held in Russia. It was in these premigration focus groups in particular that the Finnish language was used as an indication of one's Finnishness (see also Varjonen et al. 2013).

At different levels, being part of the generational continuum of Finns was approached from different angles. Very similarly to the findings of Davydova (2003) and Davydova and Heikkinen (2004), in the focus group data, the most common way of claiming membership in the category of Finns was through constructing ethnicity as biologically inherited with references to roots, blood and genes. Although Finnish ancestry was defined in the legislation and political statements with fairly objective, external characteristics (such as the number of grandparents required to gain return status), the talk and texts at the institutional level rarely displayed biological vocabulary compared to the identity talk at the interpersonal level (but note MP Aittoniemi's comment from 2002 in which he denied Ingrian Finns 'having roots in the direction of Finnishness'). In the editorials, in turn, the issue of ancestry was tackled through cultural continuation in the sequence of generations. Even though cultural or linguistic continuation is not the most typical way of understanding ancestry, our analysis shows that not only biological but also cultural claims can be used in an absolutist or essentialist fashion to empower and activate the members of the community (Hanson-Easey et al. 2014).

Finnish language was an important topic at all three data levels. At the institutional level, knowing Finnish language was used as a prerequisite for entitlement to move to Finland, arguing that the interest was to support adaptation and maximize the cultural fit of newcomers. At the interpersonal and community levels, Finnish language was discussed as a critical attribute of Finnish identity, but also in an instrumental way. This kind of utilitarian discourse on language encompasses the assumption that, if people are similar enough, there are fewer problems in the adaptation, both from the side of the migrant and the receiving society. Laari (1998) also noticed the unquestionable idea of homogeneous Finnishness in her analysis of Finnish politicians' speeches: when it comes to Finnish language and cultural similarities, even the Finnishness of Karelians or Swedish-speaking Finns has been problematized. This brings us to our concluding remarks on the in- and exclusive use of language and ancestry as markers of Finnishness.

To conclude, defining (Ingrian) Finnishness and negotiating its borders was not straightforward in any of the three levels of our data. Including and excluding Ingrian Finns from the group of Finns seemed to require extra discursive work in all data sets. This brings us to the interconnectedness of institutional, community and interpersonal discourse production and use. At the community level, stands were taken for and against issues also raised by Finnish politicians, for example, related to the ending of remigration. Also the interpersonal level identity talk often seemed to be designed to meet the requirements constructed at the institutional level. For example, producing accounts of Ingrian Finns as essentially Finnish and as capable and willing to acquire skills needed for adaptation in Finland, serves to produce belongingness to Finland and to protect Ingrian Finns from being excluded from Finns. However, the viewpoints of the Ingrian Finnish community related to the idea of Ingrians as a distinct nation were not directly referred to at the interpersonal level.

As highlighted in discursive approaches to identities (e.g., Benwell & Stokoe 2006), identity is a construct that can be creatively and strategically used for different purposes. Although communities and individuals are to some extent free to define their own identities, they are also subject to identities ascribed to them. Power between different groups is not equally divided when identities are negotiated and used. The questioning of Ingrian Finns' Finnish identity by the Finnish government and the consequent decision to end remigration serves as an extreme example of this. Despite the seemingly clear markers of Finnishness originally used as the basis

for remigration legislation, the government's decision to close down the remigration system came down, in the end, to the issue of identity, when the government one-sidedly stated that Ingrian Finns may not identify themselves strongly enough as Finnish (see parliamentary act 220/2010). Thus, the setting of boundaries of us and them is a question of social construction with concrete repercussions. Indeed, constructions of identity can be seen as abstract, fluid and situationally changing. However, as our analysis has exemplified, excluding discourses can also have very political and far-reaching consequences for countries, nations as well as individuals. For the future of culturally diverse Finland, the question of whether immigrants should be seen 'Finnish-to-be' or 'foreigner forever' (Laari 1998, see also Lepola 2000) is anything but out-dated.

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Appendix

Transcription conventions

(.)Short pause of less than one second
(2)Pause measured to the nearest second
UnderlinedEmphasis
[overlap]Overlapping speech
(...)Part not included in the extract
*Unclear word
((comments))Comments from the transcriber

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Notes

1. Nowadays this area is located around the borderland between Russia and Estonia, surrounding the city of St. Petersburg.
2. See <http://www.inkeri.spb.ru/>
3. See <http://blogs.helsinki.fi/spring-fi/>
4. The extracts from institutional and community level data presented have been translated from Finnish to English for this article. Extracts from focus group data used here are translated directly from the original Russian language transcripts to avoid double translation.
5. <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/esitykset/he/2010/20100252#id2183140>
6. http://www.migri.fi/for_the_media/bulletins/press_releases/press_releases/1/0/a_few_thousand_ingrian_finnish_returnees_still_expected
7. Lea Kärhä, Riitta Uosukainen, Tapio Holvitie, Martti Tiuri, Anna-Kaarina Luovo, Kirsti Ala-Harja, Riitta Juoppila and Kalevi Lamminen
8. All names are pseudonyms. See Appendix for clarification of transcription symbols.

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